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U.S. Ties Secondhand Smoke to Cancer

By WARREN E. LEARY

Journalist for The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 7 — Secondhand smoke causes lung cancer that kills an estimated 7,000 nonsmokers a year and subjects hundreds of thousands of children to respiratory disease, the Environmental Protection Agency said today in a long-anticipated report.

The E.P.A. study, issued after four years and several revisions, should serve as a rallying point for government and private efforts to reduce exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, Federal health officials said.

Soon after the report was released, opponents announced several legislative initiatives to place stronger restrictions on smoking in Federal office buildings and other public places. Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, the Health and Human Services Secretary, said the study would be the basis for public health campaigns encouraging nonsmokers to assert their rights to clean air.

The tobacco industry continued an attack on the report begun earlier in the week, saying the report was based on inadequate scientific data that was adjusted to fit policy. The Tobacco Institute called the study "another step in a long process characterized by a preference for political correctness over sound science."

"Evidence Is Conclusive"

William K. Reilly, the E.P.A. Administrator, told a news briefing that the report supported a growing scientific consensus that smoking is not just a health risk to smokers but also a significant risk to nonsmokers, particularly spouses and children.

"Environmental tobacco smoke, secondhand smoke, involuntary smoking, passive smoking — whatever you want to call it — has now been shown conclusively to increase the risk of lung cancer in healthy nonsmokers," Mr. Reilly said. "Taken together, the total weight of evidence is conclusive that environmental tobacco smoke increases the risk of lung cancer in nonsmokers."



Michael E. Sauter for The New York Times

Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, right, the Health and Human Services Secretary, pinning an anti-smoking button on William K. Reilly, the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, at a news conference yesterday in Washington concerning secondhand smoke and cancer.

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Mr. Reilly said 434,000 people die annually in the United States from diseases caused or aggravated by cigarette smoking, including 140,000 who die from lung cancer. This puts a smoker's risk of developing lung cancer at between 1 in 10 and 1 in 20 compared with a 10-fold lower lung cancer risk for those who have never smoked, he said.

The E.P.A. study — which was not based on new research but on previously published studies — concluded that 10 percent of all lung cancers caused by factors other than direct inhalation of cigarette smoke were due to indirect environmental tobacco smoke. This is a risk of about 1 in 1,000, Mr. Reilly said, higher than that of almost any chemical the agency regulates.

Infants Especially Vulnerable

Higher exposures to secondhand smoke, like that in enclosed homes, small rooms or automobiles, cause higher risks. The spouses of people who smoke at home face a high lung cancer risk of about 2 in 1,000, Mr. Reilly said.

Health officials said the dangers to infants and children were particularly alarming. These were among the report's findings on the effects of second-hand smoke on children.

It increases the frequency and severity of symptoms in 200,000 to 1 million children with asthma and also increases the risk of developing asthma.

It causes 150,000 to 300,000 cases of respiratory infections like bronchitis and pneumonia each year in children up to 18 months of age.

It also causes fluid buildup in the middle ear, a condition that can lead to ear infections common in children.

"It is time for Americans who smoke to make the choice to stop," said Dr. Sullivan, who attended the E.P.A. news briefing. "And, in particular, it is irresponsible for smokers to expose young children to the health consequences of the addiction."

More Smoking Bans

Dr. Sullivan, noting that 28 percent of American adults still smoke, said his department's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would use the report's findings to begin a public information campaign on the dangers of environmental smoke. The "Secondhand Smoke: We're All At Risk" campaign of television and radio commercials and print advertisements will focus on informing about hazards and "stirring people to action," he said.

Citing the E.P.A. report, Senator Frank R. Lautenberg of New Jersey

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Philip Morris trying to counter negative developments in its cigarette business. And its earnings were higher. *Business Day*, page D3

and Representative Richard J. Durbin of Illinois announced that they would introduce legislation in both chambers of Congress to ban smoking in all Federal office buildings and in almost all indoor places providing federally financed public services.

The two Democratic legislators, who wrote the bill imposing the 1989 smoking ban on publicly owned lights, said in a statement that the new measure would protect children from the harmful but little threat of environmental tobacco smoke.

The New York State Health Commissioner, Dr. Mark Chassin, noting that the E.P.A. report now formally classifies environmental smoke as a Group A carcinogen like benzene and asbestos, said Gov. Mario M. Cuomo would submit legislation to ban smoking from all school grounds. He said the proposal would also seek to toughen smoking restrictions in public places and restrict tobacco advertising.

This report should also help convince parents to stop exposing their children to harmful effects of tobacco smoke," Dr. Chassin said.

Impact on Liability Suits

The Coalition on Smoking or Health, representing the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society, called on President Bush to heed the E.P.A. report's conclusions and issue an executive order prohibiting smoking in all Federal buildings. Currently, agencies can set their own smoking policies.

Richard A. Daynard, a law professor

at Northeastern University in Boston and directs the Tobacco Products Liability Project, said the report is "extremely important" for legal action against the tobacco industry. "This basically marks the end of any debate about whether environmental tobacco smoke causes serious, fatal disease among nonsmokers," Mr. Daynard said in a telephone interview.

But Brennan Dawson of the Tobacco Institute, an industry trade group that strongly criticized the report, said the majority of studies cited by the E.P.A. do not establish that environmental smoke directly causes any disease. "And to prove liability, you have to prove causation," she said.

A limited number of copies of the report, "Respiratory Health Effects of Passive Smoking, Lung Cancer and Other Disorders," Order number: EPA-600/6-90-006F, can be obtained free of charge in about three weeks by writing: CERL U.S. EPA, 26 W. Martin Luther King Drive, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45268, or phoning 513/569-7562 or faxing requests to 513/569-7566.

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